Regional Passport Office, Ahmedabad

266. SHRI RAOOF VALIULLAH: Will the PRIME MINISTER be pleased to state:

(a) whether the Regional Passport Office at Ahmedabad is without port Officer for the last two years;

(b) whether at present the acting Regional Passport Officer for the last level of Public Relations Officer;

(c) whether there is an acute shortage of staff resulting in delay in the issue of fresh passport and what is the strength of the present staff againt the sanctioned strength;

(d) if so, what action Government have taken; and

(e) the number of applications for passports pending for more than three months in that office?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI KHURSHID ALAM KHAN): (a) No, Sir.

(b) No, Sir. The present Head of office is of the status of Assistant Passport Officer.

(c) and (d) No, Sir.

Out of the sanctioned strength of 76 posts in the passport office, Ahmedabad, 11 were vacant as on 1-7-1985. Even for eleven posts orders have already been issued to fill up these posts and incumbents are expected to be in position shortly.

(e) 430.

Effects on the Digestive Properties of 'Zeera Pani' in Space

267. SHRI VISHWA BANDHU GUPTA: Will the PRIME MINISTER be pleased to state whether the Indian Astronaut on board the Space Shuttle is likely to carry a typical Indian soft drink like 'Zeera Pani' to check the effects of its digestive properties in Space?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY AND IN THE DEPARTMENTS OF OCEAN DEVELOPMENT, ATOMIC ENERGY, SPACE AND ELECTRONICS (SHRI SHIVRAJ V. PATIL): No, Sir.

Astronauts for Space Shuttle

268. SHRI VISHWA BANDHU GUPTA: Will the PRIME MINISTER be pleased to state:

(a) what was the number of candidates considered out of whom the two astronauts for the space-shuttle were finally selected;

(b) the reasons for not selecting a women astronaut in the team; and

(c) whether there is any proposal under Government's consideration to select a woman candidate as astronaut in such flights in future?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY AND IN THE DEPARTMENTS OF OCEAN DEVELOPMENT, ATOMIC ENERGY, SPACE AND ELECTRONICS (SHRI SHIVRAJ V. PATIL): (a) The two final candidates for the Indian Payload Specialist flight on US—NASA Space Transportation System (STS) were selected from an initial set of over 260 Scientists/Engineers of DOS/ISRO who had volunteered for the selection.

(b) The initial set of volunteers had several women. However in the final round of selections no women candidates were considered as all women volunteers failed to pass medical examinations conducted as per medical standards prescribed for the Payload Specialists on STS.

(c) As and when future opportunities for human space flights arise, the women candidates will continue to have equal opportunity of competing with men candidates. All efforts will be made to encourage qualified women candidates to volunteer for future space flights.

Indian Currency Notes in Pakistan for Extremists

269. SHRI BIR BHADRA PRATAP SINGH:
MISS SAROJ KHAPARDE:

Will the Minister of HOME AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government are aware that Indian Currency notes worth crores of rupees have been clandestinely taken to Pakistan for paying to extremists for their training etc., and

(b) if so, what steps Government are taking in this regard?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF HOME AFFAIRS (SHRIMATI RAM DULARI SINHA): (a) During the period from 21st April to 15th July, 1985, BSF which is deployed on Indo-Pak border have seized Indian currency worth about Rs. 38.43 lakhs on Punjab-Pak border. Reports indicate that the Indian Currency was being smuggled to Pakistan in lieu of bullion and other contraband being smuggled from Pakistan to India. Government have no information that the currency was smuggled for payment to extremists for their training in Pakistan.

(b) Constant vigil is maintained by the BSF Joint ambushes, raids and patrols with the local Police and other preventive agencies are organized by BSF. Additional coys of BSF have been deployed on Punjab-Pak border. Dog squads and mountied patrolling have been pressed into service to intercept and apprehend exfiltrators and infiltrators. Observation towers have also been erected to watch movements of infiltrators.

270. [*Transferred to 5th August, 1985.*]

Security Arrangements during flights

271. SHRI DHARAM CHANDER PRASHANT: Will the PRIME MINISTER be pleased to state the arrangements Government propose to make for security of passengers and planes during flights in the country and abroad keeping in view the accident of the Air India's Jumbo Jet plane on the 23rd June, 1985?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF TOURISM AND CIVIL AVIATION (SHRI ASHOK GEHLOT): Although security measures had already been tightened at our airports in the context of the present situation, more stringent steps are being taken to review and strengthen the security arrangements. State Governments and Union Territories have been requested to ensure very effective enforcement of security arrangements at the airport within their jurisdiction. More X-Ray equipments and Explosive Sniffers (PD-4) are being obtained. Baggages will be indentified personally by passengers before it is taken into the aircraft. Air carriers have been asked to advise the travelling public not to accept baggage and parcels or any other items from anybody. Dogs have been trained for sniffing explosives.

The security measures have been constantly under review.